

## Who comes first?

They are either loved or hated. There does not appear to be a middle way when it comes to politics. That is why in some homes politics gets lumped with religion. It is a topic not to be discussed.

Although party politics can be emotive, the question of government needs to be faced. Why do the powers-that-be exist? How extensive is their authority? What should our attitude to politicians be? These are important questions.

We begin with three general observations. First, *leadership has existed from the beginning*. In mankind's state of innocence, at the time of creation, the first two people had different roles. One, Adam, was called to lead. The other, Eve, was called to help. They enjoyed an equal status. Mankind, as male and female, was made in and as the image of God. No other created being has such an exalted status. Yet their equality did not undermine or destroy their functionals. The tragedy is confusion on these issues exists.

Secondly, *God is a God of order*. Design and purpose is evident in the cosmos at both the grand and the microscopic levels. It is God's purpose for people to co-exist in a state of order. To that end he gives the powers-that-be.

Thirdly, *every society has had and has leaders*. Anarchy - the lack of order - does not work. Where it exists people feel insecure and frustrated.

What, then, are leaders to do? How extensive are their powers? Are there any limits to their authority?

Some, at this point, refer to the constitutional arrangements that exist. Usually they define the extent of a leader's power. But is the rule of law

good, bad or indifferent? Whose law is it? Is it imposed by a dictator? Does it have consent of the people? Is it fair or unjust?

There is another important principle: all of us are answerable to God. It is true for leaders as well as those led. The duty of all is to obey God. Sometimes, when laws made by mankind and the law of God conflict, a choice must be made. Then God, and not man, is to be obeyed.

So what are the limits of power?

We can put it this way. The duties of leaders are two. One is negative in tone, the other positive. But both are essential for a society to prosper.

The first duty of leaders is to restrain wickedness and vice. That which is offensive to God should be offensive to mankind. No leader should ever enact any law which contradicts the will of God.

Their second duty is to foster and preserve a culture in which goodness and virtue may flourish. This does not mean that political leaders should control or do the work of the church. But it does mean they should not confuse values with virtue. It also means they should not put human values or party politics above or in the place of God's law. When that happens tyranny follows.

Confusion abounds even in the corridors of power. The mantra of politicians today appears to be 'We don't do god'. But what many fail to see is that a political order which marginalises God is a system that puts itself before God. To do that is to do god!

God is to be first. Why? Because mankind was made to serve and enjoy him for ever.